

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REACTION TO SDLP OPEN LETTER

REF: BELFAST 58

1. OPEN LETTER CLARIFYING SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY (SDLP) ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICE AND UNITED IRELAND ASPIRATION HAS BEEN FOCUS POLITICAL ATTENTION IN PROVINCE DURING PAST 24 HOURS. ALLIANCE, VANGUARD AND NORTHERN IRELAND LABOUR PARTY REACTED FAVORABLY TO SDLP INITIATIVE. SPOKESMEN FOR UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COALITION (UUUC) AND (OFFICIAL) REPUBLICAN CLUBS REACTED WITH VARYING DEGREES OF HOSTILITY. CONSENSUS MODERATES IN MINORITY PARTIES IS THAT SDLP MAKING FORWARD-LOOKING AND SINCERE EFFORT DISPEL DOUBTS ABOUT SDLP POLICY. LOYALIST CRITICISMS CENTERED AROUND CONTINUED AMBIGUITY SDLP INTENTIONS TOWARD POLICE AND NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. PROMINENT OFFICIAL UNIONIST JOHN TAYLOR WHO HAS COME UNDER FIRE FROM IAN PAISLEY FOR SUGGESTING LAST WEEK THAT CATHOLICS COULD BE MEMBERS OF FUTURE CABINETS, SAW NOTHING NEW IN SDLP STATEMENT AND SAW NO USEFUL PURPOSE IN TURNING BACK CLOCK TO REINTRODUCE IDEA OF ANTI-PARTITIONISTS IN CABINET. ONE MINOR LOYALIST POLITICIAN HAS VOICED SUSPICION AD (COSTING POUNDS STERLING 720)

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WAS PAID FOR WITH TAX PAYERS MONEY. REPUBLICAN CLUBS

CHARGED SDLP WITH JOINING ADHERENTS TO "TWO NATIONS" THEORY AND ACCUSED PARTY OF TRYING TO FOOL ALL THE PEOPLE ALL THE TIME WITH EQUIVOCAL ATTITUDE ON ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY (RUC).

2. MAIN TV NEWS PROGRAMS BOTH LOCAL CHANNELS FEB. 4 FEATURED INTERVIEWS WITH SDLP POLITICIANS ON SUBJECT OPEN LETTER. JOHN HUME FACED PANEL SIX "PROTESTANT" PERSONS-ON-THE-STREET ON BBC AND AUSTIN CURRIE QUESTIONED BY PANEL THREE POLITICAL JOURNALISTS ON UTV. BOTH CAME UNDER STIFF QUESTIONING AS TO WHY THEIR POLICY STATEMENT STOPPED SHORT OF CALLING FOR CATHOLICS TO JOIN RUC, WHETHER LOYALISTS SHOULD JUDGE PARTY BY NEW WORDS OR PAST ACTIONS WITH REGARD TO POLICE, AND WHETHER, IF IN CABINET, PARTY MEMBERS WOULD USE POSITION TO ADVANCE ASPIRATION TO UNITED IRELAND. BOTH HUME AND CURRIE ACQUITTED THEMSELVES WELL STRESSING CURRENT REALITY OF SITUATION IN WHICH POLICE NOT ABLE ENTER CERTAIN AREAS NORTHERN IRELAND AND PEOPLE AFRAID TO COOPERATE WITH POLICE LET ALONE JOIN THEM. HUME ALSO CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT PARTY WOULD TAKE CABINET POSTS AS SUBTERFUGE TO ADVANCE PROVINCE TOWARD UNITY WITH REPUBLIC. HE STRESSED THAT WHEN PARTY TALKED OF UNITY IT DID NOT INTEND ABSORPTION OF NORTH BY SOUTH OR SUBMERSION OF ONE TRADITION IN FAVOR OF OTHER BUT OF AGREEMENT BASED ON MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND MUTUAL RESPECT AND ONLY REACHED THROUGH WILL OF MAJORITY.

3. COMMENT: SDLP OPEN LETTER HAS TAKEN IT ANOTHER STEP FORWARD TOWARD POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY BY MIDDLE GROUND AND BY THOSE REPRESENTATIVES OF MIDDLE GROUND IN CONVENTION MINORITY PARTIES. A COALITION OF THESE MINORITY PARTIES, INCLUDING VANGUARD, WITH SDLP IS NOW MORE FEASIBLE FOR SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE, SUCH AS ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN FOR VOLUNTARY COALITION. THERE IS HOWEVER, NO SIGN THAT THE MIDDLE IS GAINING CONVERTS FROM UUUC OR THAT "WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT" IS LIKELY BE ACHIEVED IN CONVENTION PHASE TWO.

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